

DISCIPLES WOMEN
GENERAL PROGRAM

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Mother's Day— Letting the Light of Peace Shine

Purpose

To reconnect Mother's Day with its beginning in the peace movement and not necessarily a celebration of motherhood, but rather a call to action as women; recognizing that the current celebration of Mother's Day can be a joyful as well as a challenging day for women, especially in the church.

Suggestions for the Leader

Ask participants to bring:

Bibles

Journals or notebooks and pens

Magazines to be cut up for collage candles

You will need:

For worship:

-*Chalice Hymnal* or hymns printed (see the Worship portion for hymns)

-Accompanist or singer

-Communion elements and other table preparation

-Worship participants (you can have one reader or several different readers for the Call to Worship and other parts of the service)

-Determine ahead of time a designation for the offering (suggestions: the Disciple's Peace Fellowship, a women's shelter, or other organization/place to give towards peace and justice for women).

For lesson and project:

-A white board, chalk board, or large pad of paper and markers or chalk

-Blank Saint Candles—you can usually find these tall glass candles at dollar stores. While most have pictures of saints, you can often find blank ones as well. If you cannot find blank ones, choose ones that have pictures of women saints.

-Glue Sticks

-Scissors

-Large clear packing tape (to wrap the candles in when finished)

Background for the leader:

Mother's Day is a holiday celebrated differently and on different days around the world. In the United States and Canada, Mother's Day is celebrated on the second Sunday of May. The roots of our current Mother's Day celebration began in the 1870s by Julia Ward Howe, who attempted to establish the day for a call to action for peace. During the Civil War, she had written "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," but following the horrors of the war, she became a pacifist and attempted to establish Mother's Day on July 4th. As you can imagine, that was not popular, but Howe's efforts to call women around the world into action for peace continued in her work in the suffrage movement. For women who had lost sons in the war, Howe was convinced of the need to work for peace.



Anna Jarvis (born in Webster, West Virginia) resurrected the idea of a Mother's Day, but as a day to honor one's mother in 1908 in West Virginia. Mother's Day is not an official holiday in Canada, but was made a U.S. holiday in 1914, but in the 1920s, the holiday became commercialized, with cards and flowers and gifts becoming increasingly important. Jarvis came to oppose the day she created. She protested the holiday in 1948 and was arrested for disturbing the peace.



Mother's Day has long been controversial. In recent years, churches have become more aware that Mother's Day can be very difficult: women who struggle with health concerns and infertility, women who have lost a child in utero, single women, people whose mothers have passed on, and those who have had a difficult relationship with their mothers all may struggle with this day. Yet it is a day to honor those mothers who have meant so much, those women who have given so much and have led the way for others.

- How can we reclaim Mother's Day to be a day of celebrating and honoring women, acknowledging the difficulties of the day?
- Can we reclaim some of its roots in honoring women who challenged the norms of the day (even if we do not agree with them completely) and worked for justice and giving women a voice?

The lesson will come from Luke 1:46-55, Mary's Song of Praise (the Magnificat). Mary's Song echoes the song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2:1-10, singing of God's way of justice, in which the proud are scattered and the powerful brought down from their thrones, but the lowly are lifted up, the hungry are filled with good things. Mary's Song is also in alignment with the prophets and their visions of justice, including Ezekiel in 17:22-24 (bringing low the high tree and raising up the low tree) and in 34:17-24 (gathering the scattered sheep, judging the fat and the lean sheep is like filling the hungry with good things and sending the full away empty).

While we normally read this passage in Advent preparing for Christ's birth, it is appropriate in thinking of Mother's Day, remembering that the call of God for all of us is to work for justice and peace. Women are called to be prophets, as Deborah (Judges 4-5), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14-20) and Anna (Luke 2:36-38). What is our prophetic voice as women? Where has our experience historically as mothers, daughters, sisters and wives led to justice and social change? Where does our current experience in the 21st century call us to be prophetic?

And when we look at the layers of experience of women (women of color, women of different economic and immigration statuses, sexual minority women, etc) where is "women's experience" a voice of women of privilege (white, heterosexual, higher economic status, English as first language, etc.)? Who are the prophetic voices of women? Where are we called to change? Where are we called to speak out?

In terms of peace, what are the voices of women around the world saying about peace? How do peace and justice fit together? How can we, as a church, as a gathered group of women, work for peace in our location?

Introduction

Welcome participants to the program, ask them to introduce themselves, and open with prayer. Encourage participants in this introductory time to share from their heart if they feel led to share, and for all to be open to hearing viewpoints that may be different from their own.

Ask participants to share the names of women who have been influential in history for social change and justice (for example, Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Rosa Parks, [all in U.S. history] and Nellie McClung, [a feminist and social justice hero in Central Canada with national notoriety], etc.) Write down the names for all to see.

Then invite participants to share the names of women in their lives who have stood for justice and peace—in their churches, in their families, or in their neighborhoods. Invite them to share the stories of these women as their names are written down. What has inspired you? How did they live their lives? What was unique? What did they teach you? Invite participants to write down the story in their journal and to share aloud if they are comfortable.

Lesson

Invite participants to turn to Luke 1:46-55. What is Mary declaring here? In the context of the text, Mary is speaking (or singing) only in Elizabeth's presence, but these words are shared with us. How would they have been received for the early followers of Jesus who hear these words from a woman? How do we receive these words? What is God doing?

Invite participants to imagine they were receiving these words for the first time. How would they experience them? Would the words be challenging, fearful, or hopeful? Invite participants to journal their reaction as if they were hearing these words for the first time.

Next, invite participants to enter a few minutes of silence and imagine if God was speaking to them, that God was going to do something new. Maybe they are not being called to bear God's Son, but maybe they are being called, like the prophet Deborah in Judges 4-5, to lead a people in a difficult time. Or maybe they are called like Huldah in 2 Kings 22:14-20 to declare both bad and good news. What is God saying to you to say to those around you? Take a few minutes and journal your thoughts. Share them aloud if you feel comfortable.

Ask the participants how they view justice in light of the Scriptures read and in light of what they have written. What is God calling us to do as women? What is God calling us to say? How is this different perhaps from male voices we have heard? How is it similar?

As we think about Mother's Day, in the first attempt to establish a holiday, Julia Ward Howe wanted to establish a day that would be for peace. After witnessing the horrors of the Civil War and the grieving mothers who lost their sons, Howe was empowered to work for peace.

God's justice, as described by the prophets, and even in Mary's words in Luke, is about restoration, evening out. Ezekiel describes God's justice as the high trees being cut down and the low trees raised up. Mary says the hungry are filled with good things and the rich sent away empty. Justice is not always comforting to all people, but it is about restoring what God intended for all people.

There is a famous saying, "If you want peace, work for justice." How do justice and peace relate to each other? How does our work for peace involve justice?

The founder of our current Mother's Day holiday, Anna Jarvis, later revolted against her own holiday, arrested for protesting Mother's Day in 1948 because of the commercialization of the holiday. Commercialization and consumerism can become enemies of justice and peace, because they require the desire of more goods and more consumption of resources, losing sight of what the holiday was created: a day to honor mothers.

However, we all know Mother's Day can be difficult. This is a day where some remember they are unable to be mothers at this time. Others have difficult or non-existent relationships with their mothers. Some miss their mothers. Others are single women who are singled out on this day.

At the same time, when we look back at Julia Ward Howe and Anna Jarvis, we recognize that this day can be about celebrating women and the power of women given by God to bring about change in our world for the better. While Howe's dream of an end to war has not come true, nor Jarvis' protest against the consumerist view of the holiday, what has lived on is their spirit: to celebrate women, to speak out against injustice, and to promote peace through action.

As we think about the women of history who have influenced the work of peace through justice, we also think of women in our own lives who have done this, either in the home, or through the community or the church, or even on larger, global scales. How can women continue to be a leading voice for peace and justice into the 21st century?

Journal some of your ideas and share with one another.

Respond: Lights of Peace.

Invite the participants to choose a candle, and to take a few magazines. Cut out images or words that show or describe women, peace, and justice. Find the images that are meaningful to you, reminders of God's justice in your life. Glue those images and words to the candles. Wrap the candles with packing tape to create a secure and seamless seal for your candle. Use the candles in worship.

Worship

As you prepare for worship, play music softly in the background. Invite each participant to light their own candle that they made and set it in the worship space.

Call to Worship

(women and scriptures from Judges 4-5; 2 Kings 22; Luke 1, 2, and 8; Genesis 17; 1 Samuel 2; Proverbs 8:2 and 3:17)

We hear the prophetic voice in the prophets of God:

Deborah, Huldah, and Anna.

We hear the declarations of God in the songs and stories of our foremothers in Scripture:

Sarah, Hannah, Elizabeth, and Mary.

We feel the call of Christ in the followers of Jesus:

Mary, Joanna, and Susanna.

We hear the words of Wisdom in the proverbs

“On the heights, besides the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand!”

Let us stand, let us speak out, and let us sojourn together;

for God is calling us, sisters and prophets:

“The way of wisdom is joy, and all her paths are peace.”

Opening Hymn

God of Grace and God of Glory

Chalice Hymnal #464

Prayer of Invocation

Loving Spirit, Mother and Father of us all, we know You are already present with us. Guide us in Your Wisdom to seek Your ways above all else: the ways of love, justice, and peace. If we must tear down, help us to rebuild anew; if we must take away, help us to restore; if we sin, call us to forgive. Move in us so that we may seek Your guidance, wisdom and peace in our heart and minds. In the name of Jesus, who walks along side of us, we pray. Amen.

Scripture Luke 1:46-55

Sing and Respond Song of Mary Chalice Hymnal #131

Meditation

Mother's Day is full of mixed emotions. This can be a difficult day; this can be a joyous day. We celebrate mothers and mourn those who are gone. We may look forward to this day or dread it. Anna Jarvis, founder of Mother's Day as we know it on the second Sunday of May, was actually arrested for protesting Mother's Day in 1948 because it had become too commercial. In fact, she was behind it being established as a U.S. national holiday in 1914 but by the 1920's had already regretted it. So you're not alone if you struggle with Mother's Day!



Further back in the history of the United States, the first time someone tried to establish a Mother's Day was Julia Ward Howe. Julia was an early figure in the suffragist movement. During the Civil War, she wrote *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* after meeting President Lincoln with her husband; but after the years of civil war, she became a pacifist. She saw the toll the war had taken on mothers whose sons had died. She hoped to establish a worldwide pacifist movement, and even tried to have Mother's Day established on July 4th!

Mother's Day has just about always been controversial. But when we look back at Anna Jarvis and Julia Ward Howe, we see strong women who both lived into the struggle of justice and peace—Anna with her protesting against consumerist greed, Julia with her work in the suffragist movement and in pacifism. Whether you agree with these women or not, we can understand that there is something greater in the history of this day.

Indeed, God has called us to something greater. Historically as women our voices have been silenced, not seen as important. But throughout history, even our Scriptures, it is the voices of women who have challenged the status quo. It was a Canaanite woman who challenged Jesus about the healing of her child and caused him to change his mind. It is a woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years who pushes past the disciples to touch Jesus' cloak and by her faith is made well. It is Mary and the other women who not only follow Jesus, and according to Luke, pretty much finance the disciples and Jesus throughout the ministry, but stay and prepare the body and care for him after his death and are the first to witness the resurrection.

Beyond scriptures, we know and have shared stories of women who have changed the status quo, spoken up for justice and righteousness in Canada and the U.S.. In November 1946, Viola Desmond, beautician and businesswoman from Halifax, Nova Scotia, refused to sit in the 'coloured' section of a New Glasgow theatre, which drew national attention to the racism in the province. The subsequent court battle began the nullification of Nova Scotia's laws for segregation.



In recent memory we celebrate Rosa Parks, whose actions began the bus boycott in Alabama, sparking the Civil Rights movement.

We remember the little girl Linda, the daughter of Oliver Brown, who was named in the lawsuit *Brown v. Board of Education*, breaking down the walls of segregation in schools.



There are stories around the world of women and girls who are standing up, challenging injustice, and working for peace. In our own time, it is Malala Yousafazi who is not only speaking up for the rights of girls and women, but speaking out for peace and nonviolence, after being shot in the head by the Taliban.



My sisters, my friends—what is God saying to us today? Who are the voices we need to lift up, celebrate and encourage? Where are we called to speak out for God’s justice? Where are we being led to lead?

Celebrate this Mother’s Day as a celebration of all women, of all our hopes and dreams, recognizing that our brothers, fathers, sons and spouses also benefit. Indeed, our whole world grows closer to the vision of Christ’s kingdom when we lift up one another, especially our girls and women. May we live into the vision of God’s love, justice and peace in our encouragement and lifting up of our prophetic voices. Amen.

Hymn of Response Of Women, and Women’s Hopes We Sing Chalice Hymnal #686

Prayer of Acknowledgement

God of our grandmothers and grandfathers, we come before You, acknowledging both our joy and sadness. We grieve with those who grieve this day, missing their mothers and grandmothers, aunts and sisters and daughters. We ask for the space to comfort as You comfort us, those who have challenging relationships with mothers. We pray in silence with those for whom this day is difficult, who have lost children, who have faced infertility, who have painfully crossed off this day year after year. We sit in silence, acknowledging disappointment, grief, and pain.

Silent reflection

Blessing

May you know that you are a child of God. You are God's beloved daughter; with you God is well pleased. You are loved. You are forgiven. You are whole. You are a sister to those present and those in our hearts. You are a mother and grandmother to those who seek your wisdom and guidance. You are precious to God and to each of us. You are blessed. Amen.

Hymn of Blessing: Now Thank We All Our God

Chalice Hymnal #715

Preparation for The Lord's Table

Christ has invited us to the table. As Mary, Joanna and Susana followed him, along with his mother Mary and the mother of James and John, so we know we are also invited to follow in his ways of love, justice and peace. Christ offers us new life, which begins now and is eternal. Christ desires to gather us like a mother hen gathers her chicks. God desires to comfort us as a mother comforts her child. But most of all, the Spirit guides us to live our lives as witnesses of God's justice and peace. You are invited. You are welcome. You are part of this table of God.

Words of Institution

Sharing of the Bread and Cup

(Use the resources found in the back of the *Chalice Hymnal* or other resources for Communion)

Offering

We are reminded that for many of us we come from a place of privilege, where we are free to speak and act without government retribution. There are women making change, doing the work of justice and peace. Let us listen to their voices. Let us encourage them in their work. Let us give so that the call of Christ to peace and justice may be heard throughout the world through the voice of women.

Offertory Hymn: This Is My Song Chalice Hymnal #722

Benediction

Go, and take the candle that you have made with you, remembering that Christ's light shines in you. Go forth with the light of our foremothers and grandmothers, our sisters around the world, and continue to let your light shine. In Christ there is no darkness at all. Go and share the light of peace, and bless each other with a sign of peace as you blow out your candle and leave this space. Amen.

Potential Service Projects

1. There are many organizations helping in the efforts for girls to achieve education around our world. Some of these organizations have come under scrutiny as of late so be careful in researching and choosing an organization to support. It is noted by many political leaders and educators that the key for many developing countries to make strides in the global community is through the education of girls.

Disciples Women web site (DisciplesWomen.org) offers social service projects through the Woman-to-Woman Worldwide program that help women and children in the countries the participants visit. These programs are run by the Global Ministries partners in the various countries.

2. Find a local women's shelter or afterschool program for girls that you can support through financial giving but also through volunteering. Call 2-1-1 for ideas from this United Way help line. This number works in U.S. and Canada.
3. Look at how you can support the Disciple's Peace Fellowship and other peace organizations, especially in projects that serve girls and women.. Learn more about Disciple's Peace Fellowship by visiting their web site ~ dpfweb.org or emailing them at DisciplesPeace@gmail.com